

What about the Golden Rule? Nehemiah 5

Introduction:

1. Have you ever been taken advantage of or felt exploited by somebody else? Maybe when you bought something or a business deal or an e-mail scam or in a relationship.
2. In Nehemiah 5, there were some Jewish leaders that were taking advantage of their brethren, and doing some things that were ethically and morally wrong (not necessarily against the civil law).
3. It was a rough time economically because of a dearth in the land, and these Jewish leaders were exploiting their fellow brethren for material gain. vs. 1-5
4. What did Jesus teach was the greatest command in the Bible? *"...love the Lord thy God with all thy heart..."* **Matthew 22:37**
5. Do you know what He taught was the second greatest command? *"...love thy neighbor as thyself."* (**Matthew 22:39**) People refer to this as the Golden Rule.
6. Did you know the apostle Paul reiterated the Golden Rule to believers today (the body of Christ)? **Galatians 5:14-15**
 - The word "devour" is the same word used in **Matthew 13:4** describing birds coming and devouring food. Like wild animals, these people were attacking each other.
 - It is so sad when you see churches biting and devouring one another, but Satan absolutely loves it.
7. Let's all be honest, which one comes easier for us, loving people as ourselves, or being self-centered, selfish, and wanting our way? As they say, "Look out for #1."
 - It is the "look out for #1" mentality that leads to fractured marriages, broken relationships, immorality, divided churches, divorce, teenage rebellion, thievery, and the list goes on and on.
8. There is a higher plain on which to live. It is called the Christ life. As we surrender ourselves to Christ, Christ lives His divine life through us and we, in turn, begin to live in a way that is unnatural to this world. We love our neighbor as ourselves.
9. Let's explore Nehemiah 5 and gain some practical insight in how we can love our neighbor as ourselves.

First, defend the oppressed. vs. 6-10

1. Nehemiah was the governor of the land and was leading a major rebuilding project of Jerusalem. How does he respond when he receives this news about these poor and oppressed Jews?
 - Does he turn a blind eye to it? Sweep it under the rug in order to protect his leaders? Ignore it because he is so busy with more important matters?
 - No. When he finds out, he is highly upset. vs. 6
2. Nehemiah goes to bat for these oppressed people by rebuking these leaders publicly (vs. 7-10). What a leader! He loved his neighbor as himself by defending these people.
3. **Romans 12:9** commands us to *"...Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good."*

4. When we are filled with the Spirit of Christ, we hate evil and injustice and we passionately stand up for what is right.
5. We don't allow a person to suffer injustice in order to protect somebody else. When we see somebody else being oppressed, we proactively seek to defend that person as if it was us being oppressed.

Second, lay aside your rights in love. vs. 14-15

1. Nehemiah had been governor for twelve years. As governor of that land, he had certain rights that he could claim. The governor took bread, wine, and money from the people in order to pay for his expenses (similar to tax money today). Also, it was typical for his servants and officers to take from the people and exploit them.
2. But during Nehemiah's 12 years, he claimed none of these rights, nor did he permit his servants to exact anything from the people. I like verse 15, "...but so did not I..."
 - Nehemiah knew that times were tough, so he forewent his rights.
3. What a lesson for us. Just because you may have a right or just because everybody else is doing it, doesn't mean that you should do it. **1 Corinthians 6:7**
4. The question is not, "Do I have a right?" The question is, "Am I loving my neighbor as myself?" Would I want to be treated this way? **Romans 13:10**

Third, give to those in need. vs. 16-18

1. Nehemiah not only refused to capitalize on the misfortune of others (vs. 16), he went a step further. Nehemiah gave graciously to those in need. vs. 17-18
2. Nehemiah would put on a big spread every day, and even the poor Gentiles in that area could come and partake. It was all provided at his own expense.
3. Loving your neighbor as yourself means that when you see your neighbor has a need, your first instinct is to try and meet that need. **1 John 3:17; 1 Timothy 6:17-18**
4. Paul said that what should motivate us to work is having the ability to give to those in need. **Ephesians 4:28**

Illustration: A teen can't go to camp because of money. Your neighbor is sick and the grass is knee-high. Your co-worker can't go to his kids play because of his shift hours. Somebody can't come to church because they have no transportation.

Fourth, make it right when you do somebody wrong. vs. 11-13

1. I intentionally waited to show you how this story ends. How did these leaders respond when Nehemiah confronted them with their unloving behavior?
2. Nehemiah rebuked them and told them they should restore everything they had gained by taking advantage of their brother. vs. 11
3. These men responded in a God honoring fashion. vs. 12-13
 - They said, "Nehemiah, you are right, we were wrong, and we will make this right."
4. You are not always going to love others as yourself. You will fail at times. We all do. But when God brings it to light and brings correction through His Word or through another person, how will you respond? **Proverbs 9:8**

In Conclusion:

1. I don't know that there is a greater example in the Bible of loving others as yourself than this example of Nehemiah. He was a true leader.
2. I think you can easily see why Nehemiah was a leader that others wanted to follow.
3. We have an advantage today that even Nehemiah did not have. If we are saved, we actually have the Spirit of Christ living inside of us.
4. In your fleshly effort, you will never consistently love others as yourself, but as you yield yourself to Christ in you, the sacrificial, giving heart of Jesus will live through you!